

Newsletter

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Why ParkLands Matters by Addison Burns

Currently, more than one in five species of reptiles worldwide are threatened with extinction. In 2019, the journal Science reported a net loss of almost three billion birds, or 29%, since 1970 in the United States and Canada.

Other studies show that 40% of all insect species are declining and that about 1 million species of plants and animals are threatened with extinction. Among the major causes of species loss are habitat destruction and degradation, climate change, invasive species and unregulated harvests.

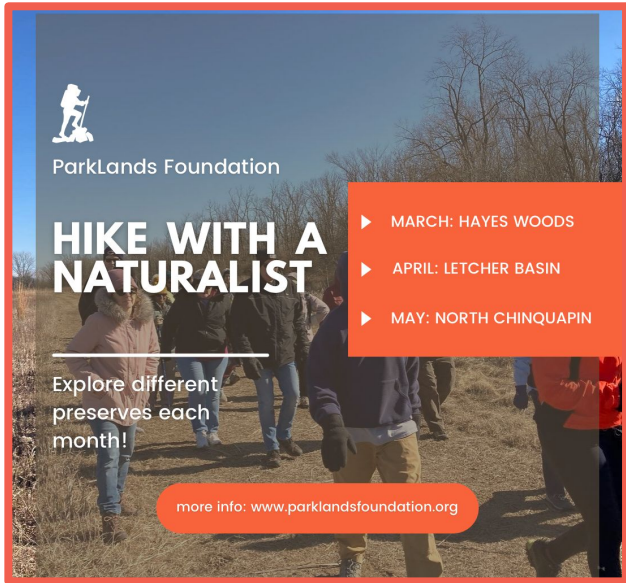
The mission of the ParkLands Foundation is to preserve historic natural lands in the middle and upper Mackinaw Valley watershed by protecting, ecologically restoring and managing these lands. Our preserves act as natural sanctuaries for native species including bald eagles, mudpuppies, river otters, and more. Your contributions and support of ParkLands Foundation are essential in creating these sanctuaries and preserving life along the Mackinaw River.



A Successful Board Retreat

On February 4th, 2023, the ParkLands Foundation Board of Directors met at Eureka College for their annual Board Retreat. The goal of the retreat was to strategize new fundraising methods, ideas, and programs to implement into ParkLands Foundation. The board was treated to an informational discussion with Grand Prairie Friends speaker, Sarah Livesay.





Introducing Hikes with a Naturalist!

After many requests for more guided hikes to be offered throughout the year, ParkLands Foundation is proud to introduce our Hike With a Naturalist series of hikes!

Starting in February, we began offering monthly guided hikes to the public across various ParkLands preserves. These hikes are unique in that they are guided by our very own volunteer Master Naturalists! The schedule for upcoming hikes is included below and in the Board Event Calendar on page 4.

Upcoming Events

April

2

Hike with a Naturalist: Letcher Basin

Join a Master Naturalist on a scenic hike throughout Letcher Basin Preserve, while learning about native flora and fauna.

22

Wildflower Walk

Experience the vibrant Bluebells and other spring ephemerals at the Merwin Preserve on our annual Wildflower Walk!

May

7

Hike with a Naturalist: North Chinquapin

Join a Master Naturalist on a scenic hike at North Chinquapin.

*Hikes reach capacity quickly. Please register at our website: <https://www.parklandsfoundation.org/events>

Interested in Hosting an Event at a ParkLands Preserve?

Our preserves are perfect for group hikes. If you're interested in hosting a hike with a group larger than 15, please let us know in advance so that we can ensure that no other conflicting events are taking place at the preserve you are interested in! Reach out to us via email at volunteer@parklandsfoundation.org.

RECAP: Celebration on the Prairie Pleine Air Artists

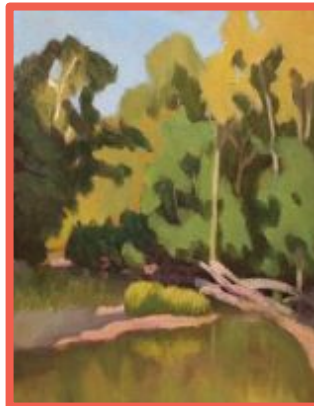
by Peg Schickedanz

Pleine Air, 'in open air', artists were invited to paint at ParkLands Foundation's Letcher Basin *Little Celebration on the Prairie* on October 1, 2022. This opportunity was open to any artist who wished to paint outdoors. Four artists participated. Both oil and watercolor artists came when the light was optimal, which is usually mid-morning or mid-afternoon, and off they went to find their own preferred site to capture their scene. Attached are images of the painters and their work. Most of the artists can be found online if you would like to see more of their artwork.

We hope artists will take advantage of ParkLands preserves to paint at their own leisure. There are many beautiful vistas, as well as diverse wildlife to capture in action. Whether you work on site or take photos and go home to complete your work, ParkLands provides a beautiful subject for creating art. If you are a first time pleine air painter the preserves are quiet and serene for trying something for the first time. Your only audience will be birds on wing or little critters silently watching you. Or take a group with you to share ideas and learn together.

These preserves offer hundreds of acres for you to pick your favorite spot. And taking your children out with crayon and paper or a child's painting set will surprise you at how well they can capture the scene. Children are good at living in the moment of what they observe.

Thank you to the artists for allowing us to show their artwork. Images are not to be reproduced without artist permission.



Top Row: *River Song*, oil, 12X11", by Deana Moore

Second Row: *Grand Prairie Gem*, watercolor, 9X12", by Peg Schickedanz

Third Row: *Along the Mackinaw*, oil, 11X14", by Melinda McIntosh

Bottom: *Mackinaw River*, oil, 11X14", by Phil Smith

ParkLands Foundation 2023 Event Calendar

January

January 1
Merwin Preserve
New Year's Day Hike

February

February 4
Board Retreat

February 5
Hike With A Naturalist: Chinquapin

March

March 11
Home Lawn & Garden Show

March 12
Hike With a Naturalist: Hayes Woods

April

April 2
Hike With A Naturalist: Letcher Basin

April 22
Wildflower Walk

May

May 7
*Hike With A Naturalist: North
Chinquapin*

June

June 4
Hike at Ridgetop (By invitation only)

July

July 8
6th Annual Bike Ride

August

August 5-6
River Event Hayes Woods

September

September 10
Annual Meeting

October

October 7
Sugar Creek Arts Festival

Looking Back Down the Trail

What's in a Name?—Hell's Bend

The Mackinaw River and its tributaries overflow with history—with the human side of things going back to the Paleo-Indians ten millennia and more. With the arrival of Anglo-American settlers in the 1820s, one of the more curious and colorful corners of this watershed carried the name Hell's Bend. Located northeast of Hudson in the general area where the Big Slough flowed into Money Creek, Hell's Bend was a timbered "neighborhood" that stood in wild-and-wooly contrast—culturally, politically, and economically—to the surrounding open prairie and its more sober settlers.

Today, Hell's Bend would comprise much of the land from Lake Bloomington's Big Slough finger to the lake's main body of water to the east, created from the impoundment of Money Creek. Generally speaking, the rural community of Hell's Bend—which straddled Hudson and Money Creek townships—encompassed what is now land around the intersection of Highway 31 and Carver Road, as well as ParkLands' Moon Preserve and the former Girl Scout Camp Peairs site (the accompanying 1874 plat map shows the Hudson Township side of Hell's Bend.) During the settlement period, Hell's Bend was initially part of the one-room Union School district. The schoolhouse was located on the prairie to the west of Hell's Bend, and a cultural clash arose between the "prairie" and "timber" groups—with the former representing sturdy, industrious Yankee farm folk, and the latter those who favored hunting and fishing, and a life more carefree than one finds behind a plow. "Those living in the woods were accused of being Copperheads' or even 'horse thieves,'" noted William Brigham in his 1951 history of McLean County schools. Copperhead, of course, was a disparaging term for northerners sympathetic to the Confederacy during the Civil War.

Be that as it may, in 1867 (two years after said war), the residents of Hell's Bend seceded from Union School to create a smaller district of their own. And yes, the new one-room school carried the name Hell's Bend!



Hudson Township (1874)

Yet despite the name, the rural community was not averse to embracing—from time to time at least—matters more heavenly. "Hell's Bend is the somewhat profane name of a little settlement up Money Creek," reported the February 15, 1884 *Pantagraph*. "At present it is the scene of a wonderful religious awakening. The meetings are held in the schoolhouse and at private houses ... and have already resulted in 52 alleged conversions."

But as McLean County became more settled and civilized, "Hell's Bend" as a school name became increasingly anachronistic. And so by 1892, Hell's Bend School took the more welcoming, amiable name of Pleasant Grove. The schoolhouse remained open until merging with Normal's Unit District in the great wave of school consolidation a few years after the end of World War II.

There's also speculation that Hell's Bend could have received its name not from its rowdy settlers, but rather from the Eastern Hellbender (*Cryptobranchus alleganiensis*), a salamander that can grow as large as 24 inches in length. Exceedingly rare in Illinois—and then only found in the Ohio and Wabash drainages—the

Hellbender has lost its natural habitat in the now-silted rivers and streams of the Great Corn Belt. The Mackinaw River, though, is home to the threatened Mudpuppy Salamander (*Necturus maculosus*), which can grow to a foot long and is often confused for the Hellbender.

Well, some mysteries may remain forever lost to time. Anyway, the next time you're taking a stroll through ParkLands' lovely 42-acre Moon Preserve, think back to the nineteenth century—well before the construction of Lake Bloomington—when this quiet corner of McLean County was known as Hell's Bend!

Next issue we'll take a look at Hell's Bend's famous favorite son—Charles Jesse "Buffalo" Jones. Bill Kemp has served as librarian for the not-for-profit McLean County Museum of History for the past twenty years. He's also a proud member of ParkLands.

"Looking Back Down the Trail" contributor Bill Kemp is a proud member of ParkLands. His day job is that of librarian for the not-for-profit McLean County Museum of History. In the next newsletter, Bill will follow-up with another, "What's in a name?" The name he'll explore in the spring? Get ready for ... Hell's Bend!

Board Member Spotlight – Keith Pluymers



Profession

Assistant Professor at Illinois State University

Favorite ParkLands "Spot"

I think my favorite ParkLands spot is Letcher Basin. I had been hiking out at Merwin since coming to Central IL in 2018 (before I knew what ParkLands was), but I've gotten to spend more time at Letcher since joining the Board and it has felt great to get to experience someplace new (to me).

Years with ParkLands

I joined the ParkLands Board in the fall of 2022, so it has only been a few months and I am learning something new with every meeting, hike, and email.

Why Volunteer?

I volunteer with ParkLands because it works to protect, restore, and maintain some of the most beautiful and precious places in Central Illinois. I'm not from here. I grew up in New Jersey and lived in Los Angeles for a decade before moving here to work at ISU. When I moved out here, everyone told me that if I wanted "nature" I'd have to go to Wisconsin or Michigan. My first visits to Merwin and first paddle board trips down the Mackinaw showed me just how wrong that is and how many special places we have right here.

What is your favorite 'memory' with ParkLands?

I've only just started, but the New Year's Day hike in 2023 was the perfect way to start the year. It was great to see such a large and enthusiastic crowd and to learn about the work that people have been doing for decades.

**This newsletter is dedicated to the memory of
Finn Amble and Mike Hall,
lifelong supporters of ParkLands Foundation.**



Finn Reidar Amble, 59, of Hudson, IL passed away peacefully at 4:45 AM on Thursday September 15, 2022, at Loyola University Medical Center in Maywood, IL.

Finn was a Master Naturalist, Elder at Second Presbyterian Church, and member of the ParkLands Foundation Board of Directors and American Board of Otolaryngology - Head and Neck Surgery. He loved playing with his two doodles, Shiloh, and Bella, being outside in nature, and above all, spending time with his kids and other family members.

He was a positive force affecting the lives of everyone around him. He spent his life mentoring and helping others — family, friends, neighbors, strangers, students, church youth, volunteers, coworkers, employees, and patients. His infectious laugh, intentional friendship, and dedication to his community will be missed by many.



Michael Allen "Mike" Hall, 67, of Normal passed away early in the morning on Saturday, January 7, 2023, in hospice at McLean County Nursing Home in Normal. He died peacefully in his sleep, with his wife, Kris, at his side.

Mike served as the first ever Administrative Director of the ParkLands Foundation (2012-16) where he managed the business operations of this nonprofit land trust. He combined his love of nature with his strong organizational skills to help professionalize and grow the organization.

A man of many interests, pleasures, and hobbies, Mike loved riding his bike through the Illinois cornfields, hiking in the Colorado Rockies, drinking Hurricanes in New Orleans, eating blueberry pie, tinkering in his workshop, slurping Dole Whip at the Magic Kingdom, riding a rocket ship at Space Mountain, swing-dancing, and watching the St. Louis Cardinals.

***Though you are no longer with us,
you will never be forgotten.***



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